



COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACT ON THE THEATRE ECO-SYSTEM

July 2021

INTRODUCTION

There is little doubt about the impact of COVID-19 and the related lockdowns on the arts generally, and on theatre in particular. Much of what we know is as the result of social media posts, news articles and anecdotal information.

Through these means, we know of the temporary and permanent closures of theatres, the cancellation of festivals, the deaths of colleagues, the cancellation of work, the loss of income and the emotional and psychological distress associated with these.

We also know about resilience and innovation, about those who have generated new and alternative streams of income, of work being created and distributed despite lockdown restrictions, and of brave attempts to migrate to digital platforms.

But we have little in the way of focused research to help us to understand the impact of COVID-19 on the South African theatre sector that could inform strategies and interventions both during the pandemic, and in its immediate aftermath as the sector opens up again.

This – limited - research project is the beginnings of a contribution in this regard.

AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The aims of the research project are two-fold:

1. To assess the impact of the pandemic on individuals who seek to make their livelihoods within the theatre sector and
2. To glean the impact of the pandemic on theatre audiences and on their attitudes to theatre as a result of the pandemic.

AUDIENCE RESEARCH

Sample

More than 1000 invitations to complete the questionnaire were distributed to people who were on a database of people who have attended theatre performances in the past. 99 completed questionnaires were returned.

Of these, 20, 2% were aged between 46-55 and most, 63,6%, were 56-years-old or older. Nearly 84% of this sample were older than 45, with most being in an age category considered to be among the most vulnerable to the coronavirus. Their responses to some of the questions are thus most useful for guiding future strategies.

Most of the respondents (66%) were women and from the Western Cape (73,7%), with Gauteng accounting for 23,2% of respondents.

Theatre attendance

Pre-COVID, 35,4% attended theatre 12 times or more per year; 20,2% attended 7-12 times per year while 31,3% attended 2-6 times per year.

More than 50% of the respondents attended theatre at least once every two months, and more than a third of the total attended theatre at least monthly.

Of the respondents, 46,9% said they that attended at least one festival featuring theatre per year, with 28,6% attending more than one festival per year. A quarter of the respondents did not attend festivals.

Since the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020 to June 2021, 58.2% said that they had not attended a theatre performance, while 41,8% said they had.

Of those who attended theatre performances during the lockdown, most had not attended more than three shows.

The obvious conclusion to draw from this massive decline in theatre attendance since March 2020, is that box-office income on which numerous independent theatres rely, was decimated during the lockdown period.

Return to theatre

A similar percentage indicated that the primary reason for not attending more theatre during the lockdown was that the theatres they usually attended were not open (44,8%) as those who feared contracting the coronavirus (43,8%). The balance of the respondents were equally divided between theatres not offering attractive enough options and having better options for home-based entertainment.

When asked “under what conditions would you become a more regular theatre attendee again?”, 37,4% chose the option “when I am fully vaccinated”, while 36,4% said that they would be happy to attend theatre now with audience restrictions imposed by government. 14% said they would return when they are convinced that the theatres are instituting the necessary COVID-19 protocols.

Of the public spaces that respondents had visited, shopping malls were highest, followed by restaurants and then schools/office and beaches, with theatre being attended the least.

Respondents felt least safe from infection in shopping malls, public transport and restaurants. Theatres reflected the smallest percentage of public places of concern.

Of interest is that an audience that has generally attended theatre has not declined because of alternate home-based entertainment options; they would attend productions if theatres were open, and if they felt safe from infection.

Given the primary age group of the sample, it is understandable that a high number would return to the theatre only once they are fully vaccinated. Yet, at least half the respondents would attend theatre now should sound COVID-19 protocols in place.

Against the backdrop of other spaces that respondents have to attend (i.e. shopping malls) or choose to attend (e.g. restaurants), theatre-goers feel more safe attending theatre - should COVID-19 protocols be in place - than going to restaurants or shopping malls which they visit a lot more frequently.

Smaller audiences, higher ticket prices?

Audiences are heavily restricted during lockdowns making many productions financially unviable. The question was posed: Should you return to theatre under these (restricted) conditions, would you be prepared to pay more as part of a smaller audience?

41,8% said “Yes” and 50% answered “Depending on the production”.

The next question asked: “If yes, and considering tickets pre-COVID cost in the region of R150, what would you be prepared to pay per ticket?”

74,2% replied that they would pay R250 per ticket (66% more) while a fifth indicated that they would be prepared to pay double (R300) per ticket.

Theatre audiences understand the economic impact of audience restrictions and are prepared to pay significantly more for theatre performances that are restricted thus.

This does not mean that they will necessarily pay such money simply to support theatre as might have been the case when the lockdowns were first initiated. Audience will apply discretion bearing in mind the usual criteria i.e. does the production have good word-of-mouth; does it feature their favourite creatives; is it a relatively well-known play; are the production values high, etc.

Online theatre

52,6% of the sample indicated that they watched international theatre during lockdown while fewer - 42,4% - watched local theatre online.

Of those who watched theatre online, 59,7% said that they liked it and that they would watch online theatre again. 19,4% said that they started watching but gave up without watching the whole show. 14,5% responded that they did not like the online theatre.

When asked what their primary reason would be for not watching theatre online, 57,5% said they believed that theatre should be enjoyed live, while 20,7% were not aware of online theatre. 8% said they prefer television and movie-streaming platforms.

53,5% said that they would pay for online theatre versus 17,2% who said they would not, while 29,3% said they would pay under certain conditions.

Of those who would pay, 23,8% said they were prepared to pay more than R100 per online show, 38% said they would pay R76-R100 and 19,1% would pay R51-R75. In other words, 80% would be prepared to pay at least R50 for an online show.

There appears to be a market for online theatre, although most believe that theatre should be experienced ‘live’.

The public has had more access to movie streaming platforms and television during the lockdowns, but it would appear that the fear of losing theatre audiences to these platforms is unfounded.

General comments

Respondents were given six statements from which to select one that most accurately reflects their attitude to the impact of COVID-19 on South African theatre.

32,3% said “I wish I could do something to support theatre but my own resources are thinly stretched”. 31,3% believes that “Government should be doing more to support theatre” while 26,3% indicated that they have tried to support theatre and theatre-makers however they could during this time. 8,1% recognized that theatre has had a hard time but that it has been tough for

other sectors too. No-one was unaware of the impact of COVID-19 on theatre, while only 2% thought that “The theatre sector should be doing more for itself rather than feel sorry for itself”.

The support from the general theatre-going audience for theatre is solid. There is no reason to believe that theatre audiences have migrated elsewhere, or that COVID-19 has forever alienated traditional theatre audiences from theatre.

As testimony to this, some of the comments in the space provided at the end of the question include:

“Would be fantastic to get back to theatre.”

“The pandemic has had a dire impact on this sector. I wish I could do more to assist.”

“I love live theatre and it is tragic what is happening.”

“There needs to be more private/public, community and government support given to the smaller theatres (Fugard Theatre, Masque Theatre) rather than just focusing on the ‘state’ theatres.”

“I really hope the theatres survive as it has been heartbreaking to see some closing down.”

“I feel so badly about artists and performers. I can only imagine the huge loss of income for them and others in the industry.”

“It would be a great tragedy to lose further theatres. The loss of the Fugard was extremely shocking and saddening....The arts are so deeply integral to life; losing any more of them to COVID would quite honestly be a national tragedy considering what the arts and theatre have meant to this country and black people in general. (I am not even a theatre-maker, but I have seen the impact on my partner who is a dancer and on her friends who have less stable income streams).”

“Wish life becomes normal and I can attend theatre again.”

“I am looking forward to attending live theatre again.”

Other comments include:

“I think the loss of theatres and production companies is due to a total lack of government support over the course of the pandemic...it might seem insignificant but I really think it has been at a real cost to the development of arts and culture over years/decades to come.”

“As I reply, 2 shows I was booked for and planned to take my learners to – *Michael K* and *Kiss of the Spiderwoman* – have been cancelled at the Baxter. Just heartbroken for all.”

“Some online theatre has been excellent, some a complete disaster. Both local and international.”

“I think government should be doing more and I have tried to support however I could, and I wish I could do more but my resources are thinly spread.”

“New ways to make theatre sustainable must be found – we cannot afford to lose this valuable resource.”

“I wish I had some spark of genius to offer...”

“I don’t feel unsafe from natural infection but will definitely decline the vaccination. And I sincerely hope it never becomes a mandatory requirement for theatre.”

“I only attended theatre events where I wasn’t spaced from my partner and forced to mask up for two hours.”

“Digitised theatre is great when it’s done well. I supposed due to budgetary constraints, theatres in SA don’t see it as viable to invest in digitisations that use more than one camera angle. However, with the international shows I got to stream, I found they immersed the audience into the world of the play better because they weren’t locked into the conventional methods of archiving.

Theatre organisations’ resistance to digitize theatre...is shortsighted in my opinion. The need for live theatre won’t go away in our lifetime but neither will entertainment technology and its continued advancements. At this point, we have to use new entertainment technologies to improve upon what we have.”

“Some musicians have found novel ways to continue performing. From one-person online gigs to short cruises with multiple musicians. While I believe that government has a responsibility to ensure the arts play a pivotal role in education, I am of the opinion that arts must take this as a complimentary rather than primary source of financing. This will ensure continued income regardless of governmental involvement. Especially with shrinking public funding. It will also give them independent bargaining power.”

“I think there have been great opportunities. But it was a steep learning curve. I think sometimes the sheer complexity of online was a huge challenge and may have soured my own appreciation. But I am still open to both online (maybe pre-recorded – not streamed) and socially distanced in-house entertainment.”

“In some European countries, theatre has been brought to the homes, some kind of private functions.”

“Worldwide, the income from online theatre and concerts has been much smaller than expected and it is not sustainable. Local theatre and concerts cannot compete with international productions but it was necessary for local groups and organisations to keep putting product online and stay in the hearts and minds of their audiences. The thrill of live theatre and music concerts is something that has been cultivated for centuries. A laptop or computer screen cannot imitate that.”

“I wish that government could understand that artistic spaces like theatres are vital to our mental health.”

“Would love to help actors and the arts in general to get back to their feet.”

“I think that all theatre-makers and production crew should be vaccinated (or offered the option of a vaccine) and that audiences should as well.”

“I feel hopeless about the future of theatre and I am actually really sad about this. I wish I could see a way forward for theatre-makers, actors and artists. A hybrid situation is not ideal, but there is probably no other way at this time.”

“I am interested to hear that there has been an online South African Theatre initiative. I did hear about a ballet initiative but those tickets were snapped up really quickly.

“Theatre is important for social cohesion and should get government support.”

“I feel for the theatre sector, as well as for the arts and culture sector in general. But the industry that I am involved in, the media industry, has also suffered quite a bit and I have lost a lot of income over the past year or so.”

“My husband is an unemployed tour operator, so the lack of financial resources has been our main constraint in every way.”

“There is no one-size-fits-all solution. One can be creative and do smaller shows but it takes time for all and I applaud the theatre community for what it has tried to do. The online theatre means the shows can reach a broader audience which is also a good thing – and time is not limited. Good luck to you all and I do all I can to support live theatre.”

IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON THOSE MAKING THEIR LIVELIHOODS IN THEATRE

Sample

An invitation to complete a questionnaire about the impact of COVID-19 on their lives and livelihoods was sent to about 480 people who generally work within the South African theatre sector.

60 completed questionnaires were received which represents about a 12% return.

Of these, 30,5% indicated that they were actors; producers accounted for 18,6%; directors comprised 10,2% of the sample with playwrights and designers making up 8,5% each. Just over 15% identified as “other”.

Most of the sample live in the Western Cape (57,6%) and Gauteng (32,2%), where the country’s largest theatre sectors are based.

Of the sample, 71% were 46 years old or older, with 15,3% aged 36-45 and those aged 26-35 accounting for 13,6%.

The responses thus reflect the experiences and viewpoints of mainly those who have been engaged in theatre for at least 10-15 years.

56% of the respondents were men, with one indicating that they were non-binary.

Theatre-related income

A third of the respondents said that they earned 76%-100% of their income from theatre prior the COVID-19 shutting down the theatre space. Just over 19% earned 51%-75% of their annual income from theatre, while 29,8% earned less than 25% from theatre. 17,5% earned between 26%-50% of their income from theatre. So, about 63% of the respondents made more than half their income from theatre pre-COVID.

During the COVID-19 lockdowns however, 95,4% said that they earn less than 50% of their income from theatre, with a massive 82,1% indicating that in fact, they derived less than 25% of their income from theatre during the lockdowns.

In answer to the question “If your income from theatre increased during COVID-19, state by how much from a similar pre-COVID period”, all who responded said that this did not apply to their experience.

Respondents were given 9 options – and they could tick as many as were relevant – to indicate how they were able to survive the lockdowns. The option that garnered the most support was “From my savings/investments” (54,2%), followed by “I’ve been able to find income from other sectors of the arts industry” (47,5%), “The support of family” (23,7%), “I’ve created my own income” (16,9%), with “Teaching theatre-related courses online” and “Support from government” (15,3% each) and “The support of friends (11,9%) being the least contributors.

From the latter information, the need for savings and investments is a clear need, though there are not that many within the sector who have the resources to rely on this form of support in times of hardship.

Loss of work

The range of work and income-opportunities lost by respondents is represented in the answers below:

Three shows with possible extensions to festivals.

A planned overseas tour.

Close to a year of bookings.

4 contracted works scheduled from March to October 2020.

5 planned stage shows, a tour to Jozi, two directed shows.

3 tour-ready productions and at least 3 new productions.

Performances in two plays.

All cancelled.

6 productions.

100% of radio work.

An international tour, which could have led to more work as well as a run at a local festival.

3 gigs in 2020, 1 in 2021.

2 projects that could not be done online no matter how hard we tried.

Designers are seldom contracted more than 3 months in advance, so it’s hard to say what the last fifteen months might have held; in the first three months of lockdown though, everything was cancelled.

Planned overseas tour.

Lost 3 directing jobs (worth R180 000) plus 33 international cruise performances (R500 000).

I had to cancel 2 full runs of 2 different shows.

Independent theatre show tour cancelled. I haven't worked as a director since August 2020.

Stayed working on planned productions but lost casual opportunities that might have arisen.

The above answers provide some indication of how theatre-makers derive their income i.e. largely on a project-by-project basis, with some able to earn well through international tours and on international platforms, and others working at local theatres and festivals.

With local theatres being shut and festivals cancelled, and international travel banned, platforms for generating income were severely restricted.

Theatre work during COVID-19 lockdowns

50% of the respondents said that they did not work in theatre at all during the lockdowns.

Others answered as below:

One online Zoom reading.

1 production, plus collaborative writing and adapting of new works.

Theatre made for online, one small funded project for the online National Arts Festival.

One production for Cape Town Opera.

1 new online performance experiment, filming of 3 old theatre pieces made for content.

A new outdoor small audience project.

1 self-generated exploratory work for 4 performances after 6 months of Zoom rehearsals.

One play.

As much as we could in small venues like country clubs and restaurants.

Participated in the virtual National Arts Festival.

Children's theatre outside.

Three small productions.

I managed to secure on directing contract, a television commercial and I featured in a small international film.

Background work on a major planned production and a couple of small tour dates on an existing production.

As much as possible mostly online.

One applied theatre gig.

2 non-paying community theatre projects.

2 X once-off performances in 2021, nothing in 2020.

4 performances for an average of 50 people.

Directed a theatre show, did a stand-up show (both very limited seasons), some outdoor performances, a couple of comedy nights at small independent spaces.

Two productions.

One solo show – film and a short run at two theatres in November 2020.

One solo show.

One virtual theatre production adjusted for COVID-19.

After first lockdown, I worked on one production last year. This year, so far, I have lit 2 productions. Very little in sight for the rest of the year.

Online theatre

60% of the respondents indicated that they did not do any online theatre work as opposed to 40% who did.

Of those who presented work on-line, 72,4% recouped less than 10% of their costs. Only 1 person made a profit.

When asked if there is a future for theatre on digital platforms, 51,7% answered “No” with the remainder divided between “Yes” (22,4%) and “Under certain conditions” (25,9%).

Respondents were given five reasons from which they could choose as many as were relevant for their not engaging in online theatre. That “theatre is the live encounter between performers and audiences” garnered 62,8% support and the next highest reason was “I do not have the resources to present online theatre”. “I did not have the opportunity to do so”, “I do not have the skills to present online theatre” and “I do not know how to monetise online theatre” all received the same level of support, about a third of the reasons that garnered the most support.

Twenty-nine respondents indicated that they did participate in online theatre with “I needed to earn an income” gaining the most votes (44,8%), even though an overwhelming majority showed that they lost money when going this route. The two other main reasons given were the desire to explore the online space and learn skills for this platform, and the need for a platform to showcase their work.

Impact of theatre on emotional and psychological well-being

While the following questions were not specifically aimed at determining well-being within the sector, they do hint at these.

37,9% of the respondents said that they or someone in the immediate family had been infected by the coronavirus.

The five most devastating things during the lockdown period for the respondents (in declining order) were the closure of theatres, the realization of how marginalized the sector is, the loss of work opportunities, the cancellation of festivals and the loss of theatre colleagues to the pandemic.

45,8% of the respondents have thought about leaving the theatre/arts sector for more sustainable income in other sectors of the economy.

Of those who responded to this question, 55,9% said that they had attended theatre shows during lockdown, which meant that a relatively high percentage of those who make their livelihoods within the sector – 44,1% - had chosen not to attend theatre during the lockdowns.

47,5% of the sample had applied for artists' relief from government sources, with 70% of them being successful in gaining such relief.

When asked what the main obstacles were in applying for relief or for the Presidential Employment Stimulus Programme funding, the effort required to apply for and report on the funding versus the benefits of the funding was listed as the main obstacle, followed by the tight frameworks for the applications and the conditions attached to the funding which received the same level of support. The next main hurdle was the unilateral changes in the amounts of funding and finally the need for tax clearance certificates.

Pessimism about the future of the theatre industry

A relatively high percentage – 46,6% - said that they were not optimistic about the future of theatre industry in South Africa.

The reasons given for the pessimism included the following:

There is no theatre industry. There is only what the individual makes. I have always been a self-sustained one-man band and have never once been reached out to actively by institutions or societies to use my talents and be paid and rewarded for them. All I have done I have done completely alone. Not complaining, but that is how it is in South Africa.

It (theatre) will remain the same. Marginalised and without any support network.

Lack of private and public funding. Theatre needs benefactors. It is a public service not a business.

As long as the spaces we can work in productively are closed or perceived as unsafe, it is impossible to imagine going back to theatre-creating as a viable business.

I am more optimistic about the futures of other industries than theatre's future.

There is too much uncertainty.

Theatre has always been a hard industry. With no festivals and big venues opening up soon, it's going to be hard to make a profit. People are lethargic and the longer people stay at home watching TV, the harder it will be to get them out of the house.

I am not optimistic about the theatre industry such as it is developing along the lines it had been before COVID-19. This is not necessarily a negative thing.

A huge depression has descended upon our industry which has made many question its function and future post-COVID. It will recover but will take a long time to find its feet again.

To be honest, I don't know how I feel about the future of theatre in this country.

There has to be massive public money support across the board and this will not be forthcoming.

We have lost too much in all areas of theatre-making and presentation.

Audience loss. Professional skills loss.

I'm tired. I don't have sufficient support.

It needs to be re-imagined. The dominating construct of theatre does not largely enter the African experience.

Theatre is heavily dependent on government funding for sustainability and reach particularly in a developing country such as ours where theatre, not too long ago, was made only accessible to the minority around city centres. With the lack of support/diminishing support of an already crippled sector, I'm afraid one just finds it difficult to remain optimistic.

If we continue trying to compete with other media (e.g. film) on their terms, we will blow it.

The arts are not taken seriously by our leaders and that attitude trickles all the way down the food chain until artists themselves forget how much value they add to society.

Theatre is not appreciated by our government (even before the coronavirus pandemic). It's even worse now. I got R5000 from the Western Cape government when we did not have the pandemic. Financial help was not there for the arts and the artists.

We have been forgotten by our government. There are no independent theatres left in Cape Town. The beautiful Fugard Theatre closing. Until we are all vaccinated, I don't see how theatres can open properly. I am heartbroken.

It was challenging before COVID-19, and this has just made it even more difficult to attract an audience.

Opportunities are scarce. Funding is still a lucky draw. The arts are still being treated as an afterthought.

The general state of the economy in SA pre-pandemic neglected an inclusive arts sector funding policy. The economy is even more stretched due to state capture issues exacerbated by poor planning, poor implementation and poor delivery. So, not much hope for a sector that apart from a few government-funded entities and projects is largely self-funded.

Optimism about the future of theatre in South Africa

Just more than half the respondents – 53,4% - indicated that they were optimistic about the future of theatre in South Africa.

Respondents were given five reasons for having been encouraged during the lockdowns, and they were invited to choose more than one.

'Innovation and resilience within the theatre industry' was the top choice, followed by 'the emergence of organisations to advocate on behalf of the sector', and a distant third and fourth were "the support of colleagues in the theatre industry' and 'the care of audiences and individual patrons who provided support' respectively. 'Government funding and support' attracted zero votes.

Those who expressed optimism for the future of theatre listed the following reasons:

Theatre people are passionate.

South Africans are incredibly resilient and can overcome all sorts of obstacles thrown at them.

If theatre is in your blood, you can't even think of a life without theatre.

We have come together and shared as never before. This, and collaboration, bodes well for the future.

Theatre has faced similar challenges throughout its long history.

The ability of theatre-makers and theatre-goers to remain hopeful.

The creativity that exists. The hunger from audiences to connect.

Theatre and live performance is a medium supported by many patrons and is an essential medium to watch art at work.

Where there's life, there's hope.

The opportunity for reinventing is ripe.

Artists in the country are finally taking government to task. One day the sector will be alive and active under new governance.

The intrinsic value of theatre has been strengthened.

People need stories and we have the ability to tell them in ways no other medium can.

Theatre is part of being human. It cannot die.

Human spirit will persevere.

Things will return to some normal.

The development of community-based theatre initiatives on a semi-professional basis.

New ways, new models, opportunities for growth and a relook at what is needed.

Theatre is unique. It always changes but the experience is unique.

You won't be able to squash the immense talent of our theatre people.

Audiences want to attend live performances. They are, in fact, hungry for it.

Theatre will survive come what may. This too shall pass and then we will need to refill our souls.

Artists are tenacious and audiences will come back.

Theatre has been my entire life. No time or point to give up on it now.

Finally, respondents were asked

If there was one thing that could be done to make you happy about being engaged in SA theatre at this time, what would that be?

The answers were:

Corporates and government to understand the value of going out to the theatre.

Fully opening up the industry and the opportunity to present real theatre performances.

Relief funding and the re-opening of independent theatres that have been forced to close. (X2)

Government support.

A new minister of arts; financial support for independent theatres and artists.

More collaboration from theatre-makers.

An increase in vaccinations so that herd immunity could be achieved soon.

Theatre to be financed in order to continue, even under restrictions. Using the strangeness of this time to promote theatre more than ever.

Open up the theatres with COVID protocols – 50% capacity. The government has a one-size-fits-all approach and I think it is laziness. Some venues can seat 400-1000 people and they can only have 100? It makes no sense to me. Also, I wish the government would stop stealing money set aside for artists. Makes me furious! Greed!!! But that is what sets artists apart – we are fueled by creative passion not by making money!

One thing that could be done to make me happy is the revival of the Arts Councils. There was something right about them.

Less apathy from our government.

Our government takes us and the work we do seriously. A huge shift needs to happen in the Dept of Arts and Culture.

Funding. Funding. Funding.

Massive government and corporate funding.

SA theatre has been in crisis for years and the pandemic has merely accelerated its demise. I don't know if I mourn that or am hopeful about it. It's conflicting. The effects of the pandemic on how people live and work are still to be felt. There are still so many unpredictable outcomes for theatre and before offering one thing that could be done, I

would first ask what has 'been done' in theatre. That theatre is an industry (not a collection of projects) has been inoperative as a market enterprise; that it requires funding, and that it is (in my view) burdened by its self-appointed moral duty as an arbiter of liberal ethics are some of the issues that theatre in South Africa needs to really interrogate without always returning to this old gospel that theatre is simply by virtue of itself Good and Necessary. The only thing I could think of that would make theatre people happy about being engaged in theatre would be for them to not to expect to make a living from it.

Having the government-funded arts houses run and staffed by theatre literate, knowledgeable and creative people with a mandate to nurture the arts in their regions, and the means and ability to do so.

To carry on working though I am retired.

Meaningful change in the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture.

Skills on how to monetise online theatre as well as conversations on decolonising theatre, leading to reimagining theatre.

A willingness from government to acknowledge the meaningful impact of the arts for socio-economic and political prosperity.

Access to creative spaces and financial support.

Greater financial security.

Roll that job out as quickly and as equitably as possible.

The replacement of the current sitting minister of sports, arts and culture.

Greater promotion of the arts by government.

If our elders were taken care of.

No discrimination in funding.

Being able to work.

The downscaling of electronic media in favour of live productions.

Support and recognition from the nation and government for the role we play and service we provide to our fellow South Africans.

Get us all vaccinated!!!!

To make sure that funding for the arts and arts administration was consistent and free from corruption.

More funding of projects and easier access to funding. School touring opportunities to grow the audiences should to my mind be a priority.

To be a recognized sector.

A decent arts policy which assisted all artists and promoted equity in diversity and did not just serve those in agreement or aligned with government structures.

More support for those who cannot afford to attend theatre, so making it accessible to a wider audience. I would dearly like to be able to produce 4 shows a year and offer work opportunities.

The authentic ear of the President himself and an acknowledgement from him on how hard our sector has been hit and what his emergency plan might be to support live artists at this time.

There should be a system that is set up for actors to receive a stipend similar to the pension fund but slightly higher for people in the performing arts. It shouldn't be for retirement only but covers health and situations like what we're going through right now.

Conclusion

The theatre sector and those who make at least part of the livelihoods within theatre have clearly been hit hard by the pandemic. Notwithstanding this and the significant loss of infrastructure, income, platforms, audiences and even lives during the lockdowns, it is highly unlikely that theatre will die.

It may take some time to be revived to its pre-COVID levels, but this period also offers time for reflection on the roles of theatre in a society as divided by income, geography, education levels, language and access to the arts, as ours.

The pessimism among many theatre-makers is not surprising given the valid reasons listed above, but it is also true that the future of theatre is dependent less on what government does or does not do, than on the theatre sector itself.

Given the clues from audiences and theatre-makers outlined in this small research project, the optimists, the resilient and those who simply care too much should come together and plan for a new, fresh vision for theatre, its re-opening over various phases (hard lockdown, softer lockdown, lockdown's immediate aftermath, and the time when herd immunity may be realized).

There are many different interests and players within the theatre sector and while such players will pursue their respective interests as best they see fit, it is in the collective interests of all that there be a fostering of unity and co-operation within the sector.

COVID-19 has been devastating.

But it has also offered the theatre sector an opportunity for re-visioning, for re-making and for greater resilience in the face of future challenges.